

**Welcome to Cunningham Falls State Park's
2017 Park Quest:
Maryland Myths Busted!**

Letterbox 1:

As you may notice there are a lot of downed trees and debris in this area and throughout the park. In the past 50 years Maryland has experienced more than 10 hurricanes and tropical storms. It is a common misconception, but many believe that if you leave the windows closed during a hurricane or tornado that the increased pressure will cause the windows to blow out so you must leave all the windows cracked. This is not true. Leaving the windows open will only cause your house and belongings to get wet and leave anyone in the vicinity exposed to injury from flying debris.

The latest, Hurricane Sandy, brought hundreds of trees down altering the ecosystem. These downed trees provide new habitat for some, while others have lost homes. Ground mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and more now have abundant new real estate to occupy. However, many bird and raptor species will have to look elsewhere for home sweet home.

This is the tenth and final year of Park Quest here in Maryland's State Parks. As a result, **2017** will be your code to open the letterboxes scattered throughout the park.

Please proceed down the road past the playground to the Visitor Center. Enjoy the walk – it's not a race between the tortoise and a hare!

1 (1)

Letterbox 2:

The Eastern Box Turtle is a perennial reptile found in much of the eastern United States. They get their name from their ability to pull their head, legs, and tail completely inside of their shell. They can do this because the bottom part of the shell, the plastron, is hinged. Box turtles are becoming increasingly rare because of habitat loss, over collection by the pet trade, and car fatalities. If you see a turtle crossing the road, and it is safe to do so, then help them out by picking them up and putting them on the other side of the road, in the direction they were going of course! Box turtles live in a very small habitat (only about the size of a football field) and will spend their entire lives, up to 70+ years, in this space. In this area they know where everything they need to survive is – food, water, shelter, and more! Removing them from this home range can be fatal, so always make sure to leave Box Turtles where you find them.

Many people like to paint or carve their names into the shells of box turtles because it's just a shell and it doesn't hurt it. This is false. The shell is a living bone that is sensitive to pain and pressure. Not only does carving into the shell physically hurt the turtle, but it

leaves them exposed to potential illness. Painting, while less painful, exposes them to predators by ruining their naturally perfect camouflage.

Please slither across the parking lot to bust the next myth!

 (2)

Letterbox 3:

Maryland is home to a total of 26 snakes, only two of which are venomous – the Timber Rattlesnake and the Northern Copperhead. These are both easily identifiable just by knowing two simple tricks. The first of which is that non-venomous snakes have round pupils, while their venomous counterparts have elliptical (or “cat like”) pupils. Another way to differentiate between the two is by the shape of the head. Venomous snakes have triangular shaped heads, while non-venomous snakes have more slender narrow heads.

Some people claim that you can tell if a copperhead is nearby because it will smell like cucumbers. This myth is actually somewhat true! Most snakes can emit musk or smell when frightened or disturbed that is meant to warn predators. Copperheads also have this ability, and it just so happens to smell very similar to cucumbers. However, if they are at rest or calm they will not release this musk.

Many people believe that rattlesnakes will always give you a warning rattle before striking. This is not always true. Snakes do not have ears, and sense when something is approaching by the vibrations in the ground. If they do not feel any vibrations then it can be possible to sneak up on the snake and startle them causing them to strike prior to rattling. Always make sure to check where you are walking before you step!

 (3)

Please proceed down the hill to the end of the parking lot to the Catoctin Furnace trail to discover the next Park Quest box.

Letterbox 4:

These Beech Trees are a prime example of people wanting to make their mark. While many trees survive this encounter many do not. Many people believe that this is a benign act that can show love or capture a moment, and that will be an enduring symbol of their present feelings. Carving into trees is a destructive act of vandalism that leaves the trees susceptible illness and eventually death. Insects and disease can work their way into the tree with greater ease causing premature death. It's a common misconception that a tree will heal itself, but this isn't quite true. It may grow new bark over or around the affected area, but it will always remain underneath the new section like a scar.

Fun Fact: Carvings and cuts on a tree will always remain at the same level! The base will

only grow wider, while all growth comes from the top!

 (4)

Keep on trekking down this trail to find the next stop!

Letterbox 5:

This vine is part of a poison ivy plant. Poison ivy produces Urushiol oil which is mildly poisonous and can cause reactions in most people. Contact with poison ivy can induce itching, rashes, and intense discomfort to the affected area. While this vine looks dead it is still potentially dangerous. The oils can remain active for five or more years on any surface, including dead vines like this one. Animals are quite resistant from the effects of the oils. Some animals, such as white tailed deer, actually eat the berries from the plants, while other animals can walk right into it and not be bothered. Most people believe that you can't develop symptoms without touching the actual plant itself. This is false. If you come into contact with anything that has the Urushiol oil on it, such as a dog's coat, you can still develop symptoms. Remember the phrase, "Leaves of three, leave them be," and you may be able to avoid any unintended encounters with this meddlesome plant. Also try to remember, "Hairy vine, no friend of mine."

 (5)

Take the pedestrian bridge, passing over Rt. 15, to continue into the furnace area to see what the final Maryland myth is all about.

Letterbox 6:

This tree, commonly known as Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), is considered an invasive species. It hails from China, and was first introduced into the United States in late 18th century. This plant is particularly troublesome because of its ability to rapidly reproduce and colonize an area and uses chemicals to suppress the growth of neighboring plants. When cut it can re-sprout, which makes eradication particularly difficult. The tree was originally introduced to the US to line streets because of its ability to grow fast. For years people believed that tree of heaven wouldn't live longer than 70 years, which is likely close to this specimen. However a Tree of Heaven in nearby Pennsylvania was aged at 120 years old. Parent trees can disperse more than 400,000 seeds annually.

 (6)

After you have **written in** all the letters return to that location to retrieve your stamp! Take a picture of your favorite bird, and congratulations on completing the Cunningham Falls State Park 2017 Park Quest!